

AUTHORIZATION TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the upcoming adjournment of the Senate, the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore, and the majority and minority leaders be authorized to make appointments to commissions, committees, boards, conferences, or interparliamentary conferences authorized by law, by concurrent action of the two Houses, or by order of the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SIGNING AUTHORIZATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that during this adjournment of the Senate, the majority leader be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills or joint resolutions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, due to an unfortunate family health situation, Senator HATCH was unable to be present on the floor of the Senate today. If he had been able to attend today's vote on the conference report to accompany S. 2845, the intelligence reform bill, he would have voted for passage of the report.

THE 108TH CONGRESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier, we will shortly be closing the Senate. But while we are waiting to process some of the paperwork, I would like to make several brief statements, the first of which looks back at what has truly been an extraordinary period of legislative progress during this 108th Congress. From tax cuts to intelligence reform, we took on the big issues, and we made great strides for the American people.

One major reform bill over a congressional term is remarkable. Two makes this Congress truly unique. In both cases, efforts at reform have been stymied for decades. The 108th Congress finally broke through the logjam and delivered for the American people.

Our mission in the 108th Congress was clear—to expand freedom and opportunities, and to strengthen America's security. As we return to our home States over the course of the afternoon and tonight and over the next several days, we can all be proud of what we have accomplished.

As majority leader, most of the time I spend on the floor focuses on floor activity and events that are important to the entire country.

What I would like to do for several minutes is to speak directly to my fellow Tennesseans who see me many times working for the large domestic issues and sometimes do not hear me

talk directly about how that affects them in their everyday lives in Tennessee. Thus, I would like to take these moments to speak directly to my fellow Tennesseans about how what we have accomplished here in Washington will benefit the States.

It begins with that first reform bill, a bill that strengthened and improved Medicare for the first time in 40 years—really since the inception of that program. Medicare will offer a reform which allows the provision of affordable health care for prescription drugs. It is truly remarkable looking back. We have a health care plan, a health care program that focuses on our seniors' security, the health security for our seniors, and it has been without prescription drugs. Up until passage of this bill, the seniors have been denied coverage under Medicare for outpatient prescription drugs. Yet today—very different than even 20 or even 10 years ago—we know that prescription drugs are the most powerful tool in the arsenal of modern medicine in order to treat illness and to prevent illness.

Under the new Medicare law, seniors will now have access to a prescription drug benefit that will begin in January of 2006.

Over 40 million seniors and individuals with disabilities will soon enjoy true health care security. Without including prescription drugs, there is no way we can look a senior in the eye—it might be your mom, your dad, your grandparents—and say: Our government is going to help you with health care security. It is impossible because up until now prescription drugs simply were not included. But they are today because of the leadership, the efforts, and hard work of my colleagues in the Senate.

How many Tennesseans does that affect? There are 40 million seniors and individuals with disabilities nationwide affected by this legislation. In Tennessee, there are 870,000 Tennessee seniors who will benefit from this provision we passed in this Senate.

In October, I joined my staff as we crisscrossed the great State of Tennessee, describing to and helping people enroll in the prescription card drug program we passed. We wanted to let seniors know in these town meetings, seniors at retirement homes and retirement centers who are currently eligible for a Medicare-approved discount card which offers them savings of anywhere from 10 percent of what they are paying today to 20 percent, 25 percent on average, and sometimes as high as 50, 60, and 70 percent. We realized the impact of this legislation when we witnessed how much they were paying for their prescription drugs when we contrast it—it is all on the Internet today—with what they can save by having that prescription drug card which seniors are eligible for today.

In addition to that average 10 to 25 percent average discount, and sometimes 50, 60, 70 percent discounts, low-

income seniors will receive a \$600 annual subsidy in extra assistance to help pay for their prescription drugs. I mention it now because if low-income seniors apply for the card, they get \$600 over the next 30 days and then another \$600 after January 1 for next year. If you do not apply for the card today and wait until after January 1, you only have that \$600. I encourage seniors, especially low-income seniors who have not applied for that card, to do so today.

As I have said many times in the Senate, if you are listening to me now through our radio or C-SPAN, I encourage you, if you do not have the card, call 1-800-Medicare tomorrow and ask what that card can do for you. The benefits are huge. I encourage seniors to take advantage of it.

In addition to that major reform of Medicare, we passed \$350 billion in tax relief, which is the third largest tax cut in history. We have cut taxes across the board for 136 million hard-working, tax-paying Americans. For Tennessee, that includes 1.7 million who saw their tax bills go down in the year 2003 because of this legislation. It comes down to the philosophy, the belief we have that taxes are the people's money, not the Government's money. We think Americans simply pay too much, and thus this Senate acted, and people's taxes have all gone down.

Our goal is straightforward: To put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Americans, thereby giving those Americans the opportunity to save for the future, to invest, to spend on their children, their children's education or school books or school supplies, buying that computer or being able to go on the Internet—those tangible items, those real advantages that were made possible because of action in this Congress.

That is the same reason we acted to extend key parts of the President's tax relief plan for middle-class families. What does that mean? It means the marriage penalty. We acted to give true marriage penalty relief, and we acted to extend that key part of the President's plan. The \$1,000-per-child tax credit we acted to extend through the year 2010. We made sure low-income Americans will continue to benefit from that very low 10-percent tax bracket, benefiting in a direct fashion.

The Jobs and Growth Act of 2003, which we passed and was signed by the President, also provided Federal funds for States to carry out essential government services and to pay for Federal mandates, mandates passed on to the States. How much does that mean? We are always talking about such big dollars. For the State of Tennessee that provision of funds amounted to \$97 million for 2003 and another \$97 million for 2004.

Regarding Medicaid, an issue that is receiving a lot of focus in my own State of Tennessee—how best to reform Medicare so that it can be sustained

over a period of time—Tennessee received \$264 million for Medicaid for 2003 and received \$193 million for 2004.

An area that does directly affect Tennesseans—did not affect all States but did affect about one out of five States in this country—that was part of tax reform we addressed in this Congress and that we passed in this Congress is the sales tax deductibility. Tennessee is one of a small number of States which does not impose State income tax. We do not have a State income tax in Tennessee. In the past, when tax time arrived, that fact put Tennesseans at an unfair disadvantage. But that is no longer the case because of action in the Senate. Because of the action we took in the 108th Congress, sales taxes can now be deducted in States that do not impose a State income tax. As a result, about a quarter of Tennesseans filing their taxes for 2004 will save an average of \$470 on their taxes.

In addition to making the tax system more equitable for Tennesseans, there is another provision passed in this Senate that very directly impacted farmers in Tennessee and the farming families in Tennessee. That is the quota system that had previously applied to tobacco. Quota owners and growers will now receive their fair compensation. In total, the tobacco buyout was \$767 million to Tennessee's tobacco communities over the next 10 years. Farmers will get a fair deal, and the State will reap the economic rewards.

Another area where we tackled real reform for Tennessee, really for the whole Tennessee Valley, focused on the Tennessee Valley Authority Board bill this Senate passed. This legislation expands and restructures the board of directors for the Tennessee Valley Authority, or TVA, and brings it in line and modernizes it, brings it up to date with the management structure of corporations of similar size and scope.

The TVA for too long had a board structure that was aligned into a framework of about 70 years ago and that inhibited its ability to react, to be flexible, to be nimble, to be responsive, and, I argue, to be fully accountable—all of which is absolutely necessary to this changing environment we have as we look at our energy needs all over the great State of Tennessee and throughout the valley.

It is interesting to me because I first introduced that bill in 1997. Nothing moves quickly in the Senate. Indeed, it took 7 years for that bill, introduced in 1997, to pass, which it did about 3 weeks ago. It was endorsed by the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association, which is the organization representing TVA's power distributors. We passed the bill, a real accomplishment in the 108th Congress.

Another local issue but an issue that as a physician is very important for me to address with my colleagues—and again, all of these accomplishments, I should say up front, we were working hand in hand with Senator ALEXANDER, my colleague in the Senate, as well as

our congressional colleagues in the House of Representatives.

One cannot go to Tennessee without hearing—and it does not apply just to Tennessee—about the growing problems of methamphetamines. Methamphetamines are sometimes called the poor man's cocaine. Meth is highly addictive, and it is an extremely dangerous drug. You see the ravages in rural communities and in the urban areas throughout Tennessee. Communities are being torn apart. Crime is being driven up. Drug addiction is on the rise, as is the cost of methamphetamines. Tennessee has been hit hard. Our State is now one of the top five methamphetamine-producing States in the Nation. It has to stop. We will stop it.

In response to this rising problem, we passed the Methamphetamine Task Force Act. States will get extra help to specifically tackle meth. In Tennessee, we will receive an additional \$2 million for the East Tennessee Methamphetamine Task Force. I am hopeful that, coupled with tough law enforcement, we will bring down the sales and methamphetamine use and will help shut down those labs and lock up the dealers who are peddling this poison.

There is a whole range of other programs that are critically important to Tennesseans that we addressed in the 108th Congress. The omnibus bill, which we just passed in the Senate, now several weeks ago, the bill that was sent to the House just 2 days ago and will be signed by the President within a few days, was a remarkable bill. Yes, it was a large number of appropriations bills.

In the next Congress we are going to do better. We are going to systematically, through the budgeting process and through the appropriations process, with full transparency and with the appropriate time, address the budgeting and spending mechanisms and process in the Senate. But although the press has talked about this bill and the way it came through, I am very proud of the bill.

Why do I say that? Because if we look at what we accomplished, we accomplished slowing spending to a level, for nonsecurity, nonhomeland security, and nondefense—which we all understand we are going to have to invest in heavily now and heavily in the future, given the war on terrorism and the importance of homeland security and establishing a strong structure; we know we are going to have to continue to invest there heavily—but if you set that aside and you look at all other what is called discretionary spending, all spending other than for security and homeland security, and defense, the overall growth was essentially zero in this spending bill. It comes out to about .8 percent or .83 percent but less than 1 percent, which is less than half of inflation.

So as we passed this huge bill coming through, we were fiscally responsible, fiscally responsible to the point that

programs, if you put them all together, essentially did not grow with inflation at all. It is that sort of fiscal discipline we are going to have to engage in and reflect again and again in the next year, in the next Congress, in the next several Congresses, as we address the deficit, which is one of our greatest challenges today, and the debt that this country has.

So as I read through some of these projects, I want to preface it by saying these projects and the projects of all the other Members on the floor of this Senate and the House of Representatives, if you put them together, do not grow the Government. In fact, in inflation-adjusted dollars actually they are being cut. So our Government is being fiscally responsible. Again, to me that is remarkable, and the press really has not talked much about that.

There are several things I want to mention that really do show we are focusing on Tennessee and are things that are a benefit to Tennessee. One is the Chickamauga Lock in east Tennessee, with \$18 million in total funding.

I have to congratulate my colleague, Congressman ZACH WAMP, who has worked so hard on this particular lock over the years.

We focused on funding the construction of critical facilities and infrastructure at Fort Campbell, where the 101st Airborne is. It is on the border of Tennessee and Kentucky.

We focused on the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System with \$4 million because there are an additional 1,000 students who will come through that school system because of the turnover of soldiers at Fort Campbell. About 850 soldiers will be coming in, and we need to match that infusion of soldiers with an infusion of funds for their children.

In Jackson, TN, an appropriation was given to rebuild public housing due to the tremendous loss suffered by area residents in that region with the 2003 tornadoes.

Over in west Tennessee, the Memphis Biotech Foundation had an initiative that will establish Memphis and that whole midsouth region as one of the national leaders and eventually the world leader in the biomedical industry.

We focused on science and technology. We do not talk as much about science and technology on this floor as I would like. We had a huge focus in Tennessee at Oak Ridge National Labs. There are some major projects there, about \$296 million worth in this particular bill that focused on things such as the Advanced Scientific Computing Research, ASCR, program there, which has great implications as its computing power can be used by other laboratories and scientists and people interested in technology and students and academicians in private industry and our military all over the world.

There is the University of Tennessee designation for the Southeastern Regional Sun Grant Center, looking at

energy and biobased energy to help solve the energy problems that we all know must be addressed by this country when we have 60-percent dependence on foreign sources of oil in this country.

There is a \$3.5 million appropriation in this 2005 appropriations conference report for the acquisition of the Walls of Jericho, which is located on the South Cumberland Plateau along the Tennessee border with Alabama. The Walls of Jericho is considered one of the most unique and biologically diverse areas in the Southeast United States.

We focused on the 164th Airlift Wing and the National Guard in Memphis, TN, and in west Tennessee, where, at the Memphis-Shelby County Airport, there was a land exchange agreement, with the tremendous help of a great corporation, FedEx, which is based in Tennessee. It involved the airport authority, FedEx, and the National Guard, and it allowed the 164th Airlift Wing to build its new facilities and allowed FedEx to expand its operations at the Memphis hub—a real win-win for our military, a real win-win for the region, and a real win-win for a tremendous company there that is serving us every day with our FedEx packages that we so vitally depend on today.

Education, I need to not be remiss by mentioning No Child Left Behind. It continues to provide historic new funding for Tennessee schools. We all saw recently where our math standings internationally in the United States are dismal. I will say something about that a little bit later if we have not completed our business here shortly. But if you look at one of the things we are doing, or you look at really any State—I use Tennessee as an example—Tennessee, for 2003, received \$3.4 million; and for 2004, \$3.68 million in Federal support.

People say the Federal Government is not doing enough in supporting education. The amount that Tennessee—Tennessee is a good example of a State—that is a 64-percent increase in K-12 education funds just from 2002. Just over that 2-year period, there was an increase in Federal funding for education of 64 percent.

With this increased funding, and the new high accountability standards with No Child Left Behind, Tennessee will be on the path of achieving academic excellence.

In closing, I do wish to express my gratitude to my fellow Tennesseans for allowing me the real honor to serve them as one of their two Senators here in Washington, DC. As I look back over the 108th Congress, I really do see a historic period in our legislative history. I look forward to continuing to work hard on the issues that matter most to Tennessee and that keep us moving this great Nation forward.

EDUCATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I will take this opportunity, while we are waiting

for paperwork, to follow up on something I just mentioned; and it is on the subject of education. It has to do with an announcement that most of us saw in the newspaper a couple days ago. The report came out last week. It is this: The United States, when you compare us to 28 other industrialized countries, and you look at math literacy for 15-year-olds, you would guess that we might be at the top. No. You would guess we might be No. 5. No. You would say: Well, the United States of America, we have to be No. 10. No. You would say, we have to be 15th out of those 29 when you compare us to other countries. The answer is no. Well, then you may say: Out of 29 countries surely we are 20th, being the most powerful Nation in the world and the most affluent Nation in the world. And the answer is no.

Out of 29 industrialized countries, for 15-year-olds—my youngest son is 17 years old, so he is 2 years older—we are 24th. I did not believe it when I first saw it, and I called my statistician friends, and they said: Yes, it is true. In fact, everybody agrees it is true. In its most recent round of testing, the Program for International Student Assessment finds that the United States falls behind—again, we are 24th out of 29—such countries as Finland, Korea, Canada, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Hungary, Spain, and, yes, France.

Even more depressing than that, these dismal results are consistent with all the international comparisons. It is not just this one study, but it is consistent with all other international studies. American students lag far behind their industrialized counterparts in math, reading, and in science across the board. Contrary to the clamor of the education lobby, it is not money. We are spending the money. We are spending more money than any other country on education. In fact, we spend 30 to 80 percent more per pupil than any other industrialized nation.

Since 1960, the U.S. has spent nearly a trillion dollars on K-12 public education. The result, according to the report, current U.S. math scores fall below Latvia. Then we look to the future. We know, as we look to the future, it is going to be based on the information foundation of our economy today. And if we are going to be competitive, it is clear we are going to have to start, because if it is true for the eighth grade, it is true for the 15-year-olds, it is true for the twelfth grade. In all of these we are failing.

If we look to the future, when we talk about outsourcing jobs, when we talk about global competitiveness and our efficiency, none of that matters very much unless we have appropriate training and education for our young people today who are the workforce of tomorrow. It is an economic reality, and we are failing.

Although we just got through the campaign season, we are looking ahead. Fortunately, President Bush

said 4 years ago: My No. 1 priority is going to be education. Sure enough, working in a bipartisan way in this body, we passed a huge reform, No Child Left Behind. This Republican-led Congress, the President of the United States were absolutely committed to saying: The status quo is unsatisfactory. We believed that every single child has that right to learn. And it is our obligation, our responsibility—a lot of people say: No, it is not a Federal responsibility, it is everybody's responsibility—to support the reforms that help meet that goal of giving every child that opportunity to and the right to learn.

Three years ago we passed No Child Left Behind. It was landmark legislation. For the first time it holds America's public schools accountable for results. Students in grades 3 to 8 are now tested every year on basic reading and math skills. We have to be able to measure progress over time. Otherwise we will not know whether what we are doing in terms of getting better teachers, giving teachers better supplies and a better opportunity to teach, we are not going to know whether anything works unless we can measure—and the measurement is under way—and to get parents involved.

Now we are able, by holding both the schools and parents accountable. They are going to get more involved and they are more involved today. We have given them specific tools to be able to measure their own child's progress and their own child's school and, if necessary, to use public funds to secure additional tutoring, public funds that weren't there before, but to use those public funds if you need that additional tutoring.

We introduced that whole concept that if the school is failing, thus your child is going to fail; if the whole school is failing, to give that opportunity to maybe send your child, if that school is failing, to a better school. Maybe it is a school down the road. That is just 3 years ago. In 3 short years, these straightforward accountability measures are getting results.

According to a March study by the Council of Great Schools, the achievement gap in both math and reading between African Americans and Whites and Hispanics and Whites is getting narrower in both categories. The National Assessment of Education Progress reports that since 2000, math scores have increased nine points among fourth graders and five points among eighth graders. Math scores for low-income fourth graders have improved even more dramatically, showing a 14-point gain. Simply by raising those education standards, public schools are striving to reach them and are making progress.

The nonpartisan, Denver-based Education Commission of the States finds that not since the 1970s have States been so responsive to Federal education reform. One might say better